250. National Security Council Directive[1]

NSC 5412/2
Washington, undated.

COVERT OPERATIONS

1. The National Security Council, taking cognizance of the vicious covert activities of the USSR and Communist China and the governments, parties and groups dominated by them, (hereinafter collectively referred to as "International Communism") to discredit and defeat the aims and activities of the United States and other powers of the free world, determined, as set forth in NSC directives 10/2[2] and 10/5,[3] that, in the interests of world peace and U.S. national security, the overt [Page 747] foreign activities of the U.S. Government should be supplemented by covert operations.
2. The Central Intelligence Agency had already been charged by the National Security Council with conducting espionage and counterespionage operations abroad. It therefore seemed desirable, for operational reasons, not to create a new agency for covert operations, but, subject to directives from the NSC, to place the responsibility for them on the Central Intelligence Agency and correlate them with espionage and counter-espionage operations under the over-all control of the Director of Central Intelligence.
3. The NSC has determined that such covert operations shall to the greatest extent practicable, in the light of U.S. and Soviet capabilities and taking into account the risk of war, be designed to:
   a. Create and exploit troublesome problems for International Communism, impair relations between the USSR and Communist China and between them and their satellites, complicate control within the USSR, Communist China and their satellites, and retard the growth of the military and economic potential of the Soviet bloc.
   b. Discredit the prestige and ideology of International Communism, and reduce the strength of its parties and other elements.
   c. Counter any threat of a party or individuals directly or indirectly responsive to Communist control to achieve dominant power in a free world country.
   d. Reduce International Communist control over any areas of the world.
   e. Strengthen the orientation toward the United States of the peoples and nations of the free world, accentuate, wherever possible, the identity of interest between such peoples and nations and the United States as well as favoring, where appropriate, those groups genuinely advocating or believing in the advancement of such mutual interests, and increase the capacity and will of such peoples and nations to resist International Communism.
   f. In accordance with established policies and to the extent practicable in areas dominated or threatened by International Communism, develop underground resistance and facilitate covert and guerrilla operations and ensure availability of those forces in the event of war,

including wherever practicable provision of a base upon which the military may expand these forces in time of war within active theaters of operations as well as provision for stay-behind assets and escape and evasion facilities.

4.

Under the authority of Section 102(d)(5) of the National Security Act of 1947, the National Security Council hereby directs that the Director of Central Intelligence shall be responsible for:

a.

Ensuring, through designated representatives of the Secretary of State and of the Secretary of Defense, that covert operations are planned and conducted in a manner consistent with United States foreign and military policies and with overt activities, and consulting with and obtaining advice from the Operations Coordinating Board and other departments or agencies as appropriate.

b.

Informing, through appropriate channels and on a need-to-know basis, agencies of the U.S. Government, both at home and abroad (including diplomatic and military representatives), of such operations as will affect them.

5.

In addition to the provisions of paragraph 4, the following provisions shall apply to wartime covert operations:

a.

Plans for covert operations to be conducted in active theaters of war and any other areas in which U.S. forces are engaged in combat operations will be drawn up with the assistance of the Department of Defense and will be in consonance with and complementary to approved war plans of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

b.

Covert operations in active theaters of war and any other areas in which U.S. forces are engaged in combat operations will be conducted under such command and control relationships as have been or may in the future be approved by the Department of Defense.

6.

As used in this directive, “covert operations” shall be understood to be all activities conducted pursuant to this directive which are so planned and executed that any U.S. Government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and that if uncovered the U.S. Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them. Specifically, such operations shall include any covert activities related to: propaganda; political action; economic warfare; preventive direct action, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition; escape and evasion and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states or groups including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerrillas and refugee liberation groups; support of indigenous and anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world; deception plans and operations; and all activities compatible with this directive necessary to accomplish the foregoing. Such operations shall not include: armed conflict by recognized military forces, espionage and counterespionage, nor cover and deception for military operations.

7.

Except as the President otherwise directs, designated representatives of the Secretary of State and of the Secretary of Defense of the rank of Assistant Secretary or above, and a representative of the President designated for this purpose, shall hereafter be advised in advance of major covert programs initiated by CIA under this policy or as otherwise directed, and shall be the normal channel for giving policy approval for such programs as well as for securing coordination of support therefor among the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA.

8.

This directive supersedes and rescinds NSC 10/2, NSC 10/5, NSC 5412,[4] NSC 5412/1,[5] and subparagraphs “a” and “b” under the [Page 749] heading “Additional Functions of the Operations Coordinating Board” on page 1 of the President’s memorandum for the Executive Secretary, National Security Council, supplementing Executive Order 10483.[6]

1. Source: Eisenhower Library, Special Assistant to President for National Security Affairs Records, President’s Papers. Top Secret. This directive was transmitted to the NSC under cover of a December 28 note from NSC Executive Secretary Lay. Lay stated that the President had approved the directive on the same date.
2. See Foreign Relations, 1945–1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment, Document 292.
3. Document 90.
4. Document 171.
5. Document 212.
6. Document 157.